

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. An organic shell inlay blank comprising:
  - a first layer of organic shell matter having two opposed surfaces defining a first thickness therebetween rendering the first layer flexible;
  - a second layer of organic shell matter having two opposed surfaces defining a second thickness therebetween rendering the second layer flexible, one of the surfaces of the first layer substantially overlapping and being secured to one of the surfaces of the second layer; and
  - a bonding agent securing together the first layer and the second layer, thereby forming the inlay blank.
2. The blank of claim 1, wherein the first and second layers each have a thickness of about 0.004 to 0.015 inches.
3. The blank of claim 1, wherein an amount of the bonding agent between the first and second layers is minimized.
4. The blank of claim 1, wherein the first and second layers each include only a single piece of organic shell material.
5. The blank of claim 1, wherein each of the first and second layers have an oriented grain pattern, the oriented grain patterns of the first and second layers being overlappingly disposed when the first and second layers are bonded together.

6. The blank of claim 1, wherein the first and second layers each includes a sheet of organic shell material, each sheet being made of a plurality of substantially non-overlapping pieces of organic shell material joined by a bonding agent.

7. An organic shell inlay blank comprising:  
a plurality of layers of organic shell matter, each layer having two opposed surfaces defining a thickness therebetween rendering each layer flexible, each layer being stacked on another layer with substantial overlap; and  
a bonding agent disposed between the stacked layers thereby joining the plurality of layers together to form the inlay blank.

8. The blank of claim 7, wherein the thickness of each of the layers is approximately 0.004 to 0.015 inches.

9. The blank of claim 7, wherein an amount of the bonding agent between the opposed layers is minimized.

10. The blank of claim 7, wherein each of the layers includes only a single flattened piece of organic shell material.

11. The blank of claim 7, wherein each of the layers has an oriented grain pattern, the oriented grain patterns of adjoining layers being disposed with a common orientation when the layers are bonded together.

12. The blank of claim 7, wherein each of the layers includes a sheet of organic shell material, each sheet being made of a plurality of pieces of organic shell material joined together by a bonding agent without substantial overlap between pieces.

13. The blank of claim 12, wherein at least a portion of the surfaces of each layer are curved, all of the surfaces having a predetermined radius of curvature.

14. The blank of claim 12, wherein the surfaces of each layer are substantially planar.

15. The blank of claim 7, wherein the plurality of stacked layers includes at least five layers.

16. The blank of claim 7, wherein the plurality of stacked layers includes at least thirty layers.

17. The blank of claim 7, wherein the plurality of layers has a thickness of about 0.030 to 0.250 inches when joined.

18. The blank of claim 7, wherein the plurality of layers has a thickness of about 0.060 inches when joined.

19. The blank of claim 7, wherein one of the layers is made from a first species of shell and another of the layers is made from a second species of shell.

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20. A method for manufacturing an organic shell inlay blank comprising the steps of:

cutting a plurality of flexible pieces of organic shell matter from an organic shell;

stacking the pieces in a substantially overlapping relationship with a bonding agent between the pieces; and

urging the pieces together while the bonding agent cures to thereby form the inlay blank.

21. The method of claim 20, wherein each of the pieces has a thickness of approximately 0.004 to 0.015 inches.

22. The method of claim 20, wherein the blank has a thickness of about 0.030 to 0.250 inches.

23. The method of claim 20, wherein the blank has a thickness of about 0.060 inches.

24. The method of claim 20, wherein the cutting and stacking steps include cutting the pieces from the shell in a given sequential order and stacking the pieces in the sequential order.

25. The method of claim 20, wherein the urging step includes urging the pieces together between substantially planar surfaces.

26. The method of claim 20, wherein the urging step includes urging the pieces together between at least partially curved surfaces.

27. The method of claim 20, wherein the urging step includes urging the pieces together with a press.

28. A method for manufacturing an organic shell inlay blank comprising the steps of:

cutting a plurality of flexible pieces of organic shell matter from an organic shell, each of the pieces having edges;

arranging the pieces without substantially overlapping the edges and with a bonding agent between the edges;

urging the pieces together while the bonding agent cures, thereby forming a sheet;

repeating the cutting, arranging, and urging steps at least once until a plurality of sheets is formed;

stacking the formed sheets with a bonding agent between the sheets; and

urging the sheets together while the bonding agent cures to thereby form the inlay blank.

29. The method of claim 28, further including the step of flattening the pieces after the cutting step.

30. The method of claim 28, further including the step of smoothing the surfaces of the sheets before the stacking step.

31. The method of claim 28, wherein the step of stacking the sheets includes the step of adding one sheet at a time to a stack, and the step of urging the sheets together includes the step of securing one sheet at a time to the stack, the adding and securing steps being repeated until an inlay blank of a predetermined thickness is formed.

32. The method of claim 28, wherein the step of stacking the sheets includes the step of stacking a plurality of sheets prior to the urging step.

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